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AUTHOR	Winter, Paul A.; Partenheimer, Philip R.
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ABSTRACT

This is a report of a study of the lack of qualified applicants for administrator positions in public schools. Objectives of the study were as follows: to respond to calls for more empirical studies about administrator recruitment and applicant decisions before an employment interview; to experimentally manipulate the way the position of assistant principal is structured to determine if this would attract applicants; to determine if men and women differ in their attraction to assistant-principal vacancies; and to determine if teachers enrolled in administrator-certification courses are more attracted to an assistant-principal position than teachers not enrolled in such courses. The study was a factorial experiment as well as a recruitment simulation. Participants in the study were public-school teachers selected at random from 12 schools and administrator-certification courses at 2 universities. Results of the study include the following: There was no difference between men's and women's willingness to consider the job of assistant principal. Middle-school teachers rated the job of assistant principal higher than did high-school teachers. Teachers admitted into administrator-certification programs rated the job of assistant principal significantly higher than did teachers not admitted into such programs. (Contains 3 tables and 58 references.) (WFA)

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Running Head: APPLICANT ATTRACTION TO ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL JOBS

Applicant Attraction to Assistant Principal Jobs: An Experimental Assessment

Paul A. Winter

University of Louisville

Philip R. Partenheimer

Lanesville Community School System

Send Correspondence to:

Paul A. Winter

University of Louisville

College of Education and Human Development

Education Building, Room #335

Louisville, KY 40292

Phone: (502) 852-0617

Fax: (502) 852-4563

E-mail: winter@louisville.edu

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EA 032 198

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Applicant Attraction to Assistant Principal Jobs: An Experimental Assessment

Educational researchers are drawing increasing attention to an apparent crisis in public school leadership caused by the lack of qualified applicants for administrator vacancies, primarily the principalship (Bowles, 1990; Bowles, King, & Crow, 2000; Fenwick, 2000; Whitaker, 2001). This phenomenon does not exist because of a shortage of administrator certified personnel. There are sufficient numbers of individuals who are administrator certified and are nominally qualified to assume principal positions; however, they are not applying for position vacancies because they are not attracted to the job (McAdams, 1998; Winter, Rinehart, & Muñoz), in part, because of the enormous responsibilities accorded to public school principals in today's educational environment emphasizing school reform and student achievement (Duke, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1994; Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998).

Although researchers have begun to focus on the problem of principal recruitment, there is still scant empirical research about the recruitment of public school administrators, including assistant principals (APs). Because of this gap in the education literature, Pounder and Young (1996) called for more empirical studies about administrator recruitment. Existing research about

the AP position is primarily anecdotal or subjective in nature (e.g., Black, 1980; Cantwell, 1993; Glanz, 1994) and, to date, there have been no experimental studies about AP recruitment.

Empirical research about the AP position would appear to be urgent because the AP position is the stepping-stone into the principalship. If there were, indeed, a lack of attraction to the AP position on the part of a majority of potential applicants, this would create a two-fold dilemma for public schools. First, filling AP positions could become a problem similar to the problem that has emerged relative to filling principal vacancies. And, second, if people are not attracted to the AP position in sufficient numbers, this will exacerbate the now critical shortage of applicants for principal vacancies. This study addressed the above concerns by focusing on the issue of assistant principal recruitment using an empirical research approach derived from previous private sector recruitment research (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990) and experimental studies about teacher recruitment (Young, & Heneman; Young, Place, Rinehart, Jury, & Baits, 1997; Young, Rinehart, & Heneman, 1993; Young, Rinehart, & Place, 1989; Winter, 1996).

The cadre of public school teachers constitutes the broad pool from which school districts must recruit APs, and the typical job qualifications required of APs are teaching

experience and administrator certification. This raises the question of what the job attributes of the AP position are and how teachers, both administrator certified and not administrator certified, perceive the position and its attractiveness as a stepping-stone into a administrative career.

Theoretical Framework

Recruitment models developed in the private sector framed this study by guiding the selection of the independent variables of interest. An applicant attraction model developed by Rynes and Barber (1990) postulates that characteristics (i.e., attributes) of the job itself are among the most salient influencers of applicant decisions such as the decision to apply for the job. Based on this postulate, job attributes, emphasizing either discipline or instructional leadership AP job duties, became an independent variable of interest in this research. The other three independent variables were personal characteristics of the teacher-participants, who role-played as applicants for an AP vacancy. These variables were: school level (elementary, middle school, high school), gender, and administrator certification program status (admitted, not admitted). We selected personal characteristics because two other existing recruitment models (Schwab, 1982; Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987) postulate that personal characteristics of the job applicant influence applicant decisions such as the

decisions to apply for the job, accept an interview, and accept a job offer.

Purpose

This research had five objectives. The first objective was to respond to a call by Rynes (1991) for more empirical studies about applicant decisions that occur prior to the initial employment interview. These decisions (e.g., applying for the job, accepting a job interview) are critical to the recruitment process because they must all be affirmative or the hiring process will fail. In this study, the participants reacted to assistant principal positions described in formal job descriptions such as those routinely conveyed to potential job applicants by district recruiters via such recruitment media as position announcements, mailed job descriptions, and recruitment web sites.

A second objective of this research was to respond to a call by Pounder and Young (1996) for empirical studies about administrator recruitment. The vast majority of recruitment studies in the education literature address teacher recruitment. This study was the first empirical investigation about assistant principal recruitment using the experimental approach used successfully in private sector research (Rynes, 1991) and teacher recruitment research (Young, Rinehart, & Heneman, 1993; Winter, 1996).

The third objective of this study was to experimentally manipulate the way the position of assistant principal is structured to determine if, as some have suggested (Black, 1980; Glanz, 1994; Golanda, 1991; Hess, 1985; Kindsvatter, 1971; Marshall, 1992), this would increase the attraction of potential job applicants to AP vacancies. The method used to accomplish this task was to have the study participants react to two versions of an assistant principal job, one emphasizing the traditional role of the position (discipline) and the other emphasizing a role some (Glanz, 1994; Golanda, 1991; Marshall, 1992) have argued is a much neglected but appropriate role (instructional leadership) for APs, especially in today's environment stressing improved instruction and student learning (Murphy, 1991).

The fourth study objective was to determine if men and women differ in their attraction to assistant principal vacancies. Some researchers (Glazer, 1991; Shakeshaft, 1989) have asserted women are disadvantaged in the administrator hiring process due to gender bias. Other researchers (e.g., Pounder & Merrill, 2001) maintain that women are attracted to administrator positions to the same degree as males, but are systematically ignored in the administrator hiring process by search committees and district personnel divisions traditionally controlled by men.

The fifth objective was to determine if teachers who have self-selected themselves into an administrator certification program are more attracted to an assistant principal position than teachers who have not entered an administrator certification program. Some researchers (e.g., Bowles, 1990; McAdams, 1998) have noted there is no shortage of administrator certified personnel; rather, administrator certified personnel, in their majority, are not sufficiently attracted to administrator positions to apply for position vacancies. There is preliminary evidence that this problem may exist in the principal recruitment context (Winter et al., 2001), but there is no empirical evidence concerning this problem as it may relate to recruiting APs.

Hypotheses

The primary hypotheses tested in this research involved two directional hypotheses and one null hypothesis. They are as follows, with the directional hypotheses stated first.

$\underline{H}^1$: Simulated applicants for an AP vacancy will rate the job higher when the position emphasizes instructional leadership than when the position emphasizes student discipline.

$\underline{H}^2$: Simulated applicants for an AP vacancy will rate the job higher if the applicant is admitted, versus not admitted, to an administrator certification program.

H^3: There will be no group mean differences in the AP job ratings of male and female simulated job applicants.

Methods

This study was a factorial experiment as described by (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). The design was a 2 x 3 x 2 x 2 completely crossed fixed-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA), as specified by Kirk (1995), with equal cell sizes (n = 7). The design was also a recruitment simulation involving the experimental approach used successfully in both private sector recruitment simulations (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Schwab, 1982; Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987) and in teacher recruitment simulations (Young et al., 1989; Young et al., 1997; Winter, 1996).

Participants and Sample

The participants in this study were public school teachers (N = 168) selected at random from a large pool of volunteers working at 12 schools and attending administrator certification courses at two universities in a midwestern state serving as the research site. The participants represented all geographic regions of the state. The total sample size and cell sizes derived from a power analysis conducted according to procedures developed by Cohen (1988, p. 396). The specifications for the power analysis were: (a) a medium effect size (ω^2 = .06), (b) a

planned alpha level (α = .05), and a specified level of power (β = .80).

Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study were: job attributes (discipline, instructional leadership), school level (elementary, middle school, high school), gender, and administrator program status (admitted, not admitted). Participant self-reports on a biographical data instrument operationalized school level and gender. The researchers operationalized administrator program status in two ways. First, collecting data from teachers attending administrator certification courses operationalized the "admitted" level for the administrator program status variable. Self-reports on the biographical data instrument also indicated whether or not the participants were enrolled in an administrator certification program. Teachers who had not been admitted into an administrator certification program operationalized the "not admitted" level of the administrator program status variable.

To operationalize the job attributes variable, the researchers accessed 10 assistant principal job descriptions in actual use. Job duties (i.e., attributes) appearing consistently across the 10 job descriptions were used to create a simulated assistant principal job description instrument. Ten discipline job duties (e.g., "direct the school-wide discipline program,"

"recommend suspension and expulsion of students in accordance with statutes, policies, and administrative procedures") and 10 instructional leadership job duties (e.g., "observe and critique classroom instruction," "evaluate the curriculum to meet the educational needs of students") operationalized the job attributes on two versions of an assistant principal job description instrument, one emphasizing student discipline and the other emphasizing instructional leadership.

All other content of the job description instrument was held constant across the two versions of the instrument and was based on the content of actual job descriptions in the focal state. The instrument had instructions directing the participants to role-play as applicants for an assistant principal vacancy. In the simulation, the participants received instructions to assume that (a) "the job is located at the same school level (elementary, middle school, high school) where you are currently working" and (b) "you hold a valid (state name) Administrator Certificate." The instrument had a section describing "General Qualifications" for the job such as "five years teaching experience", an "Administrator Certificate," and "good communication and organization skills." The instrument also specified reporting relationships (e.g., "reports to the principal") and terms of the job ("205 days").

The title of the final section of the job description was "Primary Responsibilities." At the beginning of this section, both versions of the job description stated the assistant principal "assists the principal in supervising and coordinating staff and students, providing leadership, promoting a positive learning environment, and managing the school." The manipulation of the job attributes variable followed the above information in the form of a list of responsibilities emphasizing either student discipline or instructional leadership.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was an additive composite score for applicant rating of an AP position. The items, scales, and scale anchors were: (a) "How likely would you be to apply for the assistant principal position described?" (1 = Very unlikely to apply, 5 = Very likely to apply), (b) "If offered, how likely would you be to accept an interview for the assistant position described?" (1 = Very unlikely to accept, 5 = Very likely to accept), and (c) "If offered, how likely would you be to accept a job offer for the assistant principal position described?" (1 = Very unlikely to accept, 5 = Very likely to accept). The researchers adopted these items from previous recruitment studies conducted in the private sector (Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber; Rynes & Lawler, 1983) and the education sector (Young et al., 1989; Young et al., 1993; Young et al., 1997; Winter,

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1996). In previous research, these items consistently rendered high levels of reliability when used to form a composite rating of a job, generally yielding coefficient alphas of .80 or higher. The researchers created a job evaluation instrument containing appropriate instructions and the three rating items described above.

Pilot Study

A pilot group of teachers (N = 71), with characteristics similar to the participants in the actual study, completed the research instruments. The objectives of the pilot test were to perform a manipulation check for the job attributes variable, check the clarity of the instrument, and assess the reliability of the composite score serving as the dependent variable (rating of the job).

After completing and handing in the instruments, the pilot participants opened a sealed envelope containing a questionnaire with two items, one rating item and one multiple-choice item. The rating item was: "In choosing between a job orientation focused on either student discipline or instruction, how would you rate the orientation of the assistant principal job described in the job description you just read?" (1 = More Focused on Student Discipline, 7 = More Focused on Instructional leadership). An independent-samples t-test, with job attributes serving as the grouping variable and the score on the above

rating item serving as the dependent variable, verified that the manipulation of the job attributes variable was perceived by the pilot participants as intended ($t = -15.2$, $p < .001$).

The multiple-choice item queried the participants about the type of job qualifications required for the AP position described in the job description. The item had four choices, with the correct answer being "both 5 years teaching experience and administrator certification." Seventy-four percent of the participants answered correctly, indicating the majority of the participants read the job description carefully enough to recall this information accurately. Coefficient alpha for the composite rating was .97, which greatly exceeded the minimum coefficient of internal consistency required for use of a composite score in statistical analysis (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Based on the pilot results, the instruments were adopted for use in the actual study without further modification.

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers used a standardized script to administer the instruments in person at school locations and university administrator certification class locations. On a voluntary basis, the participants completed the research instruments either before a regularly scheduled faculty meeting, or a before a regularly scheduled administrator certification class. The participants took part in the study by: (a) reading, signing,

and dating an advised consent form, (b) completing a biographical data form, (c) reading a job description instrument, and (d) rating an AP position using a job evaluation instrument with the three rating items described earlier.

Results

The descriptive statistics for the participants appear in Table 1. Because of the balanced design of the ANOVA procedure

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Put Table 1 about here

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and the status of gender as an independent variable in the analysis, an equal number of males (n = 84) and females (n = 84) took part in the study. The means for age and teaching experience were 39.9 years and 13.7 years respectively. The ethnicity distribution was 159 White teachers (94.6%) and nine minority teachers (5.4%). These data closely parallel the national demographics for public school teachers (United States Department of Education, 2001).

The biographical data sheet contained 7-point rating scales for willingness to consider an AP position and interest in completing administrator certification. An independent-samples t-test (t = -.38, p > .05) revealed there was no difference between male and female willingness to consider a job as assistant principal. A similar analysis (t = .9, p > .05)

indicated that men and women also did not differ relative to their interest in pursuing administrator certification. These results suggested that, prior to participating in the recruitment simulation, males' and females' attraction to the assistant principalship and interest in school administrator certification was equal in magnitude.

The next step in the analysis was a four-way ANOVA. The cell means and standard deviations for this procedure appear in Table 2. The ANOVA results appear in Table 3. As can be seen

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Put Tables 2 and 3 about here

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from Table 3, there were significant main effects for school level (elementary, middle school, high school) and administrator program status (admitted, not admitted). To further analyze the significant effects, the researchers performed a Tukey (HSD) post hoc test.

The Tukey test indicated that middle school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 10.8), role-playing as applicants for an AP position, rated the job significantly higher than did high school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 8.5). There were no significant group mean differences between middle school teachers and elementary school teachers, or between elementary teachers and high school teachers. The post hoc analysis also demonstrated that teachers admitted into an

administrator certification program (M = 11.8) rated the job significantly higher than did teachers not admitted into an administrator certification program (M = 7.4).

The omega-squared statistic, computed according to procedures described by Keppel (1991, pp. 222-223), determined the practical significance of the significant main effects. School level accounted for 4% of the variance in rating of the job. Administrator program status explained 24% of the variance in rating of the job. The total proportion of variance explained (28%) met the criterion established by Cohen (1988) for a "large effect size" in analysis of variance.

With respect to the primary hypotheses tested in this analysis, the results were as follows. The directional hypothesis that simulated applicants for an AP position would rate the job higher if the job emphasized instructional leadership, as opposed to student discipline, was not accepted. Teachers rated the job the same regardless of the job attributes emphasized. The directional hypothesis that simulated applicants for an AP position would rate the job higher when the applicant was admitted to an administrator certification program, as opposed to not being admitted, was accepted. Finally, the null hypothesis that male simulated applicants and female simulated applicants would not differ in their mean ratings of an AP position was not rejected. Men and women rated the job the same.

Discussion

The above findings have implications for recruitment practice and for future recruitment research.

Implications for Practice

The descriptive data provided by the participants prior to the experiment indicates men and women are equally willing to consider a job as AP and equally interested in completing administrator certification. The experimental finding that men and women rate the AP equally, when role-playing as applicants for an AP vacancy, lends further empirical evidence to the conclusion that women are as attracted to administration and the AP position as men. And, yet, women remain underrepresented in administrative roles in public education, possibly due either to bias against women in the hiring process (Glazer, 1991; Shakeshaft, 1989) or the tradition of viewing administration as a masculine role (Hudson, 1991; Hudson, 1994; Ortiz, 1982; Ortiz, 1995). Given the emerging shortage of qualified applicants for administrative vacancies, it would appear urgent for school district officials to recognize women may be an untapped source of school leaders (Pounder & Merrill, 2001) and become more aggressive in recruiting women into AP positions.

It is also notable that, even though there were significant effects, the highest of the group mean score, 11.8 for individuals admitted to an administrator certification program,

was less than overwhelming in magnitude. The possible range for the three-item composite rating was 3 to 15 with 9 being the midpoint on the scale. If the majority of individuals admitted to an administrator certification program found an AP position attractive and had serious intentions of pursuing the job, one might expect such individuals to rate the job closer to the high end of the scale. Despite the significant effects for administrator certification program status, district recruiters may still face a challenge in obtaining adequate applicant pools for AP vacancies. It is possible that, as various researchers (e.g., Fenwick, 2000; McAdams, 1998) have found relative to principal vacancies, many individuals earn administrator certification for reasons other than pursuing the job, such as increasing one's salary, and do not seriously intend to apply for position vacancies.

However, having noted the modest magnitude of the admitted group's mean score, the significant administrator certification program status effect does indicate that teachers who self-select into administrator preparation are more viable as applicants for AP vacancies than teachers who do not self-select into administrator preparation. The practical implication of this finding is that school districts should seek to encourage teacher leaders to enter administrator preparation as an

important step in increasing their attraction to AP and other administrative positions.

The finding that teachers do not view an AP position emphasizing instructional leadership as more attractive than an AP position emphasizing the traditional AP role of student discipline does not bode well for the notion of restructuring the AP position (Glanz, 1994; Golanda, 1991; Marshall, 1992) to make the job more suitable for professionally developing future principals or making the AP position more attractive to potential job applicants. It appears that the general pool of teachers views the job of AP as unattractive even if the job is configured to focus on instruction. This failure to prefer an instructionally focused position exists also for teachers admitted to an administrator certification program.

Finally, the main effect for school level, with middle school teachers rating the job significantly higher than high school teachers, but with no significant differences between middle school teachers and elementary school teachers or between elementary school teachers and high school teachers, is difficult to interpret. One possible explanation is that middle school teachers have a greater tendency to view the AP position as a promotion to a higher paying and more prestigious position than do high school teachers. High school teachers may have lower attraction to the AP position because of the far greater

extracurricular and evening duties assumed by administrators at the high school level (Duke, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1994). For high school teachers the increased pay and prestige of an AP position may not compensate for added job duties, longer work hours, and other negative factors, such as more severe student discipline problems than are experienced at the middle school level. Elementary teachers may not be as attracted to AP positions because of the relatively higher level of job satisfaction experienced teaching at the elementary school level versus the middle and high school levels (Miskel & Gerhardt, 1974). Fresco, Kfir, and Nasser (1997) found that elementary teachers, when compared to middle and high school teachers, were the most satisfied with their job status, income, and working conditions. Findings such as those cited above suggest that, in the case of elementary teachers, the increased pay and prestige of an AP position may not compensate for the potential loss of job satisfaction experienced teaching at the elementary level.

Implications for Research

The findings of this study indicate the general population of teachers views the job of AP as unattractive even if the position emphasizes instruction. Even teachers admitted to administrator preparation do not rate the job at the high end of the scale. Future studies should address manipulating other attributes of the AP position, such salary and fringe benefits,

which might make the position more attractive. It would also be useful to query teachers directly, using structured and unstructured interviews, to discover why teachers perceive the AP position as unattractive. Information gleaned from studies such as these would allow policy makers to know if any strategy to restructure the job of AP would impact its attractiveness for potential job applicants.

Finally, future studies about AP recruitment should be guided by existing private sector recruitment theory (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Schwab, 1982; Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag). Using this theory as a framing device for this study resulted in finding significant personnel characteristics (school level, administrator certification program status) that are significant in the AP recruitment context.

Conclusion

Given that the AP position is a stepping-stone into the principalship it is vital for researchers to develop more empirical knowledge about this important administrative job. Successful AP recruitment is needed to alleviate the shortage of qualified applicants for administrative positions in general and principal vacancies in particular (Fenwick, 2000; McAdams, 1998; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Both correlation designs (Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Rynes & Lawler, 1983) and experimental designs (Young et al., 1993; Young et al., 1997; Winter, 1996; Winter &

Dunaway, 1997) have been effective for investigating teacher recruitment effects. The task remains to apply these approaches in the context of AP recruitment. It is hoped that the findings of this study will stimulate increased empirical research about the AP and, thereby, contribute to more effective recruitment of administrators to lead our public schools. Effective school leadership is a primary factor in achieving the important goal of improving student learning (Murphy, 1991).

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Participants

Variable	n	%	M	SD	Range
Age			39.9	10.3	21-64
Ethnicity					
White	159	94.6			
Minority	9	5.4			
Yrs Teaching Exper.			13.7	9.9	1-35
Willingness to consider an AP job			3.7	2.3	1-7
Interest in Certification			4.4	2.5	1-7
Highest Degree					
BA/BS	45	26.8			
MA/MS	112	66.7			
PhD/EdD	11	6.5			
Type School					
Urban	37	22.0			
Suburban	61	36.3			
Rural	70	41.7			

N = 168

Table 2

Cell Means and Standard Deviations

Job Attributes:		DI			IL		
School Level:		EL	MS	HS	EL	MS	HS
Gender and Program Status:							
Male	M	9.6	13.6	9.9	11.3	12.9	10.7
Admitted	SD	4.7	1.6	4.6	3.5	3.3	3.8
Female	M	12.3	12.7	10.1	13.1	13.3	12.6
Admitted	SD	2.7	2.1	3.3	1.3	2.2	3.0
Male	M	6.3	8.0	5.6	7.0	8.1	7.0
Not Admitted	SD	3.7	4.5	3.6	4.2	4.1	3.8
Female	M	7.1	7.9	7.0	10.0	10.1	5.0
Not Admitted	SD	4.9	5.2	4.2	4.5	2.9	3.6

Note. Means and standard deviations are based on additive composite scores. DI = discipline, IL = instructional leadership, EL = elementary, MS = middle school, HS = high school.

Coefficient alpha = .97

N = 168, n = 7

Table 3

Analysis of Variance for Applicant Rating by Job Attributes, School Level, gender and Program Status

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F
Job Attributes (JA)	1	36.2	36.2	2.6
School Level (SL)	2	153.4	76.7	5.6 *
Gender (G)	1	38.1	38.1	2.8
Program Status (PS)	1	814.9	814.9	59.5 **
JA x SL	2	7.8	3.9	.3
JA x G	1	2.4	2.4	.2
JA x PS	1	2.4	2.4	.2
SL x G	2	28.0	14.0	1.0
SL x PS	2	4.2	2.1	.2
G x PS	1	.4	.4	.1
JA x SL x G	2	12.4	6.2	.5
JA x G x PS	1	.4	.4	.1
SL x G x PS	2	11.1	5.6	.4
JA x SL x PS	2	19.7	9.9	.7
JA x SL x G x PS	2	30.0	15.0	1.1
Error	144	1,970.3	13.7	
Total	167	3131.7		

Coefficient alpha = .97

N = 168, n = 7

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .0001$

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